

“Somebody’s Fool”

By: Susan Bennett

- (1) I hated thirteen! Not only was I the youngest kid in the eighth grade, but I believed I was the ugliest and most unpopular although my best friend, Cheryl, argued she held that dubious distinction. Worse yet, Mom was taking my adolescence even worse than I was. She started saying stupid things, “Somebody will love you for your brains and because you are nice. Remember, there’s a lid for every pot. Just wait until you grow up; you’ll find people just like you concerned with the important things in life.”
- (2) She just didn’t get it! I wasn’t uninterested, just unsuccessful at being cool. I was well-versed in rock-and-roll stars and knew the words to all the songs on the Top 40 radio station. Besides, I didn’t want to be loved for “what was inside.” I wanted to be desired for my outward appearance just like all of my peers. I hungered to hear gasps of excitement when the bottle spun toward me at parties. And I craved desperately to be noticed by Kenny Campbell.
- (3) Kenny was every thirteen-year-old girl’s dream. Even some of the fourteen-year-olds liked him. Rumor had it a ninth grader was intending to ask him to the Sadie Hawkins’ Dance! Kenny had perfect hair. The bluest eyes, was the tallest boy in the class, and had the nerve and creativity to steal the substitute teacher’s purse and return it with a sample bottle of whiskey inside to get her in trouble. Kenny was number one in my book, even if he couldn’t spell or do long division or pass the history test. Kenny was every movie star and teenage singer rolled into one. He could hit, run, make touchdowns, become elected student council president, and even the teachers loved him because he was “all boy.” I would have killed to win Kenny’s approval, though I’m not sure even that would have attracted his attention.
- (4) My mother could not understand my obsession for someone who seemed to her to be so ordinary. “One of these days you will see,” she would say. “The fire that burns brightest burns out first.” She would have loved for me to forget my silly infatuation and to have gone to the sock hop with Arnold Tropfeld, the only boy in our entire junior high who could use a slide rule.

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- (5) I will never forget my surprise and pain the day my best friend, Cheryl, who had braces, thick glasses with rhinestones, and limp, brown hair, showed me the note she had found in her locker.
- (6) *Roses are red, violets are blue, you’re sure cute, and I am to.
A secret admirer. K.C.*

Source: *Teaching Powerful Writing* by Bob Sizoo

- (7) No. It couldn't be. Bad enough Kenny wouldn't look at me twice but to send a note to shy, book-wormy Cheryl was unbelievable. "I bet this is a trick," I told Cheryl. "I bet Linda did this to get even for the secret you spread about her and Clarence Trimble."
- (8) "We'll see," retorted Cheryl. "I saw him looking at me the other day in music class. Last month in *Seventeen Magazine* I read if you stand tall and believe in yourself, others will believe in you, too. I've been believing I'm popular all week and already it's working! I bet he's going to ask me to go to the school carnival with him."
- (9) My mother had been reassuring Cheryl that once her braces were off, her skin cleared up, she was old enough to get contacts, and she had "grown into herself," she would be a beauty. Maybe Kenny Campbell could see her potential and wanted to get his bid in early. I was heartsick and jealous like I had never been before not even when Edith Spurd got her own horse.
- (10) I tried to tell myself I didn't care anyway about a boy who wore mirrors on his shoes to get a laugh. Or who called Ramona Brindle "cootie" to be mean and get a snicker out of the other boys; how could I justify my fascination with someone who could be so cruel to others? But the facts remained, I was undercut by Cheryl because she had faith and Kenny still hadn't noticed I was alive. Maybe I did need to read that article in *Seventeen Magazine*.
- (11) Two weeks later when I met Cheryl at our usual after-school meeting place, I was prepared for the daily litany of K.C. stories. How he passed her three notes in history class. How he opened his mouth full of mashed potatoes in the school cafeteria and honored her with the game "See." How he had three of his friends call her and inquire whom she liked. Friday was the school carnival, and we both figured Kenny would ask Cheryl to go with him. Not only would my best friend be going to the fair with Kenny, but I wouldn't have anyone to go with myself. I went to the library on my way home from school and checked out three books to read over the weekend.
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- (12) The next morning in the hall after math class, Cheryl looked up at me with tears in her eyes. "I'm never coming back to this crummy school ever again," she said in a quavering voice. She handed me a note. I read:
- (13) *April fools! You just won the ugliest girl in school contest. The prize is this note for your scrapbook. Come back in 20 years after you take some beauty pills.*
K.C.

- (14) “He gave it to me in front of all of his friends,” sobbed Cheryl. “They just laughed. What did I ever do to them? How can I face school on Monday?”
- (15) I was dumbfounded and disgusted. Even more shocking were the words from my lips; they were my mother’s!
- (16) “Don’t worry,” I said. “Someday somebody will love you for your brains and because you are nice. Remember Cheryl, there’s a lid for every pot. Just wait until you get older; you’ll find other people just like you who are concerned with the important things in life.”
- (17) Cheryl just looked at me, disbelieving.
- (18) “Cheryl, he’s just a dumb boy.” I said, starting to cry. “No one will even remember him after junior high school. Someday, no one will laugh at his stupid jokes and disgusting grin. Remember, a hot fire burns out fast!”
- (19) “Don’t you know anything?” Cheryl said sharply. “There will always be Kenny Campbells in the world and people who laugh at their stupid jokes just to be popular.”
- (20) Then Cheryl took a deep breath and drew herself up tall. Behind her glasses, her eyes shone. She reached into her book bag and pulled out a dog-eared magazine. “Go read *Seventeen*,” she ordered through a thin smile. “I’ll meet you at the corner near my house at 6:00 and we’ll go to the carnival together. Think you can get up the nerve to go on the Ferris wheel?”